

by The Local Outcast

1. Chapter 1

****Midnight Genesis****

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><p>Chapter 1**

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UNSC Pillar of Autumn

Monday, September 19, 2552 1:03 AM

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>"Okay, bringing low-level systems online," said one of the tech officers who was busy punching in the codes on the keyboard "Cracking the case in thirty seconds."<p><p>

The cryogenic case in the room below the tech officers' control center immediately blew steam out from the cracks in its hinges.

"He's hot. Blowing the pins in five." said a second tech officer

When the person inside of the case felt the heat beat against his armor, he stirred a bit and opened his eyes feeling a bit drowsy. The door to the case slowly swung open letting the cool air rush in and un-fog the face plate of his helmet. The man, who happened to be a seven foot tall soldier in green battle armor and a green helmet with an orange face plate, stood up and hopped out of the case to be greeted by a young man with brown hair in a yellow tech officer jumpsuit (who was the second tech officer).

"It's nice to see you awake, Master Chief," said the second tech officer "How're you feeling?"

"Eh, kind of drowsy," said the Master Chief "But other than that, I feel fine."

"That's good," said the second tech officer "Captain Keyes wants to see you on the bridge ASAP. Just follow me."

The Master Chief then followed the second tech officer through a series of corridors all the way up to the bridge of the Pillar of Autumn where a tall, grey-haired man in a captain's uniform who appeared to be in his fifties or sixties stood by the main computer waiting for them.

"Captain Keyes." said the Chief

The man turned to face the Chief.

"Good to see you again, Master Chief." said Capt. Keyes shaking hands with the Master Chief

"Good to be back, sir." said the Chief

"Hey there, Chief." said a familiar voice

A purple and black A.I. hologram appeared with the appearance of a woman in her early to mid twenties with a very well designed short cut hair-do. Judging by the voice and the smirk she was giving the Chief, he recognized her as Cortana, the Pillar's shipboard A.I. and the Master Chief's long-time partner and friend.

"Sleep well?" she asked

"I would slept better if it weren't for your lousy driving." said the Chief

"So you did miss me." said Cortana smiling

"Why is it that you wanted to see me captain?" asked the Chief to Keyes

"I'm glad you asked. Well, Chief, as you already know, the Autumn had entered slipspace en route to the coordinates of one of the Covenant's fleet," explained Keyes "Not only did we find their coordinates but we also foundâ€¦ this."

Keyes typed in a few keys on the keyboard of the main computer. The screen came up with a video recording of what appeared to be a giant, metallic ring. The Chief found himself surprised by its massive structure. Never before had he seen anything so huge and mysterious

in his entire career as a SPARTAN-II soldier. There was a chilling silence in the air. There was something about this ring that just seemedâ€¦ threatening.

"A giant ring?" asked the Chief

"So it seems." replied Keyes

"Out of all the artifacts to hunt for, why this ring?" asked the Chief

"Who knows," said Keyes "But whatever reason why this ring is so important to the Covenant we can't let them have it. I have a bad feeling that if we do, it may lead to the Human races' downfall. Which is why we're going to land the Autumn on the ring and stop them from whatever it is they plan to use it for. And if we're going to go up against an entire fleet, we're going to need some extra fire power."

"Sir, the other SPARTANs have arrived." said Cortana who flickered away for a moment when Keyes was explaining about the ring

"Good, send them in." said Keyes

Master Chief was surprised to hear that he was going to be working with other SPARTAN soldiers other than himself. He thought that he and SPARTAN Linda-058, one of his fellow comrades, were the only surviving SPARTANs since the fall of Reach, the planet where all SPARTANs were to be trained. In through the doors came a group of SPARTAN soldiers. The Chief hardly recognized them because of the different armor color.

"Hey, Master Chief," said a SPARTAN in blood red armor "It's been a while."

"104? Fred?" asked the Chief

"In the helmet," smirked Fred-104 who then looked over at a SPARTAN in grayish-black armor "Along with Will-043."

"Redecoration much?" chuckled the Chief

"Yeah, those Covenant bastards pretty much wrecked our armor in that last battle. So Will, Kelly-087 and I had our armor fixed and repainted." said Fred

The Chief looked over at two other SPARTANs. One who was a bit shorter than himself wearing golden brown armor and another in white armor that was a lot shorter than the rest of the SPARTANs in the room. In fact, the white armored SPARTAN was shorter than everyone in the room.

"Who are these guys?" asked the Chief

"Oh, you mean these two? The brown one is Evan-049 and the small one is Mikayla-625." said 104

"I thought that you'd all get along," said Keyes "Alright everyone, since the engines need some adjusting, you have two hours to prepare yourselves before we land. I want you all to be ready for any

Covenant threat. Do I make myself clear?"

"Sir, yes sir!" said the SPARTANs

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>"About the two other SPARTANs," said the Chief while he and Fred were walking down the hallway "Are they new?" <p>"Evan is in from the third class so he's been here for about a while now," said Fred-104 "As for Mikayla-625, she's from the fifth class who just went through the augmentation process about two months ago. Speaking of classes, there is one thing I wanted to ask you."<p>

"Which is?"

"How'sâ€| how's Linda doing?"

The Chief stopped in his tracks and lowered his head slowly with sorrow. He still felt responsible about his teammate's injuries when she was shot multiple times by Covenant forces. Not only did he feel responsible for Linda-058's affliction, but he also felt responsible for all of the SPARTANs who died on that day when the planet Reach fell into the hands of the Covenant.

"She isn'tâ€| you knowâ€|" started Fred

"Noâ€| she'sâ€| still aliveâ€|" said the Chief slowly and genuinely "Butâ€| "

Fred put his hand on the Chief's shoulder comfortingly.

"I understand," he said "I worry about her too."

Suddenly, the alarm went off. It echoed throughout the entire ship wildly.

"Attention all crewmembers," announced the PA "The ship is currently under fire by an enemy fleet. Please remain calm and-"

BOOM! The ship shook violently almost knocking the Chief and Fred down on their knees. Knowing that the Covenant had found them and they were most likely about to board, they dashed to the weapons room, grabbed whatever weapons were available and then ran straight to the bridge preparing for the worst to happen.

2. Chapter 2

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><p>Chapter 2<p>

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>The sounds of gunfire, explosions and screams of both Covenant and UNSC soldiers alike echoed throughout the Autumn. The SPARTANs, Keyes and a handful of UNSC marines were stationed on the bridge guarding all entrances. As the Chief listened to the screams and cries of the dying crewmen, he grew more and more impatient of waiting. He knew just as well as the others that those men needed

help ASAP. He couldn't just stand by and watch them die like his late fellow SPARTANs on Reach.

"Sir! Permission to leave the bridge." requested the Master Chief

"That's a negative Master Chief," said Captain Keyes "I know you want to save the crewmen as much as I do but if the enemy gets to Cortana first they'll learn everything. Force deployment, weapons researchâ€¦ Earth."

The Chief hesitated.

"I understand, sir." he said

"Sir! Here they come!" said a UNSC marine

"Alright men, brace yourselves," said Keyes "Do not fire until I give the signal."

Everyone on the bridge aimed their weapons at the entrance to the bridge. The footsteps of one of the Covenant's platoons grew louder and louder as they came closer. After they came directly at the door, a moment of complete silence had filled the room. The marines were fiddling with their guns fearfully wondering what was going to happen next. Then, a small yet sudden CLANG hit against the door. And within a few seconds laterâ€¦ BOOM! The door had collapsed and a large cloud of smoke had covered the area where the door once stood. From out of the smoke came several lasers aiming for the humans.

"Fire at will!" said Keyes

Without a moment's hesitation, all of the humans returned fire and peace was immediately shattered on the bridge. Within a few minutes into the battle, a sky blue and white object that looked as if it was releasing some sort of mist landed in front of the humans.

"Plasma grenade!" cried one marine

Everyone immediately scattered in different directions as the plasma grenade started to go off. When it detonated, only two marines died in the explosion. Captain Keyes wasn't very sure if they were going to make it since the _Autumn_ was outmatched by the number of troops that the Covenant had. It was then decided; everyone was either to abandon ship or abandon hope.

"Cover me!" said Keyes to several of the remaining marines

Keyes immediately raced to the _Autumn's_ _main computer and began typing on the keyboard.

"Captain, what're you doing?" asked Cortana who's holographic image appeared

"Getting you off this ship." said Keyes

"What?" asked Cortana

"I'm initiating code protocol article two," said Keyes "We're abandoning the _Autumn_. And that means you too, Cortana."

"While you do what, go down with the ship?"

"You could say that. I'm going to try to land the _Autumn _on that object we found."

"With all due respect sir, we already have enough _dead _heroes."

"I appreciate your concern but it isn't my decision. The protocol is clear: destruction or capture of a shipboard A.I. is unacceptable which means whether you like it or not you're leaving this ship. Now, lock in a selection of landing zones, upload them to the neural lace and then get ready for a hard transfer."

"Aye, aye, sir."

After Cortana disappeared and followed the list of instructions that she was given, she reappeared with a solemn look on her face.

"Alright sir, landings uploaded." she said

"Excellent work, Cortana," said Keyes "Are you ready?"

Cortana looked around at her surroundings. This was surely the last time she would see the _Autumn_ in one piece. After taking one last glimpse of her now former home, she closed her eyes, lowered her head and sighed.

"Yank me." she said

After pressing a few buttons, Cortana's hologram, functions and everything else was uploaded into a small computer chip. Keyes removed the chip and headed out to rejoin the others. When he did only seven humans were still standing; all of the SPARTANs and two marines.

"Master Chief!" called Keyes "Catch!"

Captain Keyes then threw the chip over to where the Chief was standing. Just as the Chief was about to catch it, an Elite came, knocked him down and caught the chip. Master Chief then pulled the trigger on his MA5B assault rifle and effectively wounded the enemy from the head down to the waist. After the Elite collapsed dead, the Chief grabbed the chip out of his enemy's cold, dead hand and inserted it into his helmet.

"You alright?" asked the Chief

"Yeah I'm fine," said Cortana who then changed the conversation "Say, your architecture is almost the same as the _Autumn's_."

"Don't get any funny ideas." warned the Chief

"Chief!" said Fred "Captain Keyes has initiated code protocol two!"

"Hmph, and I was just starting to have fun too." muttered the Chief to himself "Alright, 104 you go with 625 and the marines. 043, 049, you're with me."

"Yes sir!" said the SPARTANs

The Master Chief along with Evan-049 and Will-043 exited the back of the bridge through a series of hallways while killing some annoying Grunts along the way. Eventually they came across a couple of surviving marines who were having some Elite and Grunt problems.

The Chief fired his assault rifle covering Evan and Will as they headed for cover. One of the Elites were so close to hitting him in the head but luckily, the shot missed by only a couple centimeters. The Chief then rolled to Will and Evan and took cover.

"Jesus are you crazy!?" asked Cortana "Watch your head! There's two of us in here remember?"

"Hehe, sorry." said the Chief

Evan, who was busy reloading his M90 Mk. I shotgun, came out of cover and quickly fired and reloaded in a rapid yet accurate pattern. CH-CH BANG, CH-CH BANG, CH-CH BANG went the shotgun. Evan had successfully taken down the Elites and Grunts that were present in the room.

"Yeah, boy! That's what I'm talking about! Oo-rah!" cheered Evan

The Chief walked by him and repeatedly glanced from Evan to the corpses lying on the floor.

"How long have you been a SPARTAN again?" asked the Chief

"Fifteen good, long years sir," said Evan "Why?"

"Justâ€¦ asking." said the Chief

"What he means is," said Will "Nice shot."

The trio then ran out of the room and eventually caught up with some marines at the end of a hallway. But as they did meet up with them, a sound of a canon hitting its desired target erupted followed by the ship shaking. Some of the marines were startled and began looking around the ship chatting amongst themselves.

"What the hell just hit us?" asked one marine

"Everyone! To the airlock! Move it!" said another marine who was their current leader

The SPARTANs and the marines headed towards the airlock to find that two crewmen were guarding the door. However, the door exploded killing the two men which was now left with no one guarding the door now. A small group of Elites and Grunts began to burst into the hallway and the humans immediately took action. Just in case there was more of them, Will threw a frag grenade into the airlock where they came from. When the grenade exploded, it sent a couple Elites flying into the wall.

The Chief first knocked an Elite out with the back of his assault rifle and then shot oneâ€¦ twoâ€¦ three Grunts one at a time, all in the head. As the rest of the group were finished off, the SPARTANs

found a window that showed the life pods outside being launched and shot at by a Covenant fleet.

"They must really not want us on that ring." said Evan

"We have to move before all of the life pods are launched." said Will

Thinking that the airlocks could be a possible shortcut to the lifeboats, the SPARTANs moved through the pitch-black airlocks killing all enemies who stood in their way. When they came at the other side of the airlock they encountered several Elites who were just about to kill a panicking marine. 043 and 049 took action and fired at the Elites while the Chief took the panicking soldier and threw him into the nearest (and last) life pod there was.

"SPARTANs! Into the lifeboat!" ordered the Chief

"Alright but hang on a sec," said Evan "I almost got this one gu-"

"TODAY!!" shouted the Chief

"Alright, alright, we're coming!" said Evan-049 "Geez, cranky."

As soon as the two SPARTANs moved into the life pod, the Chief immediately closed the door and turned to the pilot.

"Punch it." he said

"Aye, aye sir," said the pilot who then punched in a few keys on the keyboard that dispatched the pod from the ship "We're disengaged. Goin' fer a safe minimum distance."

"Sir, are we gonna make it? I don't wanna die out here!" said the panicking marine

The Chief put his hand on the marine assuring him that everything was going to be okay.

"Heads-up everyone, this is it!" said the pilot "We're entering the ring's atmosphere in five!"

"Hey, shouldn't you take a seat?" asked Will who was already seated

"No." said the Chief

"Alright but if you crash right through the window don't go crying to me." said 043

"I'll be fine." said the Master Chief

"If I still had fingers, they'd be crossed." said Cortana as the pod entered the ring's atmosphere

3. Chapter 3

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><p>Chapter 3**

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>"We're going too fast!" said Cortana as the ring's surface came into view <p>"Damn! The engine's been jammed! I'm losin' her! I-" said the pilot<p>

BOOOOOM!!!

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>"Chiefâ€|? Chief? Chief!" called a voice <p>"Chief can you hear me? Oh Godâ€|" said another voice<p>

The Chief had slowly regained consciousness. At first he thought that he was dead until he felt his chest slowly moving up and down informing him that he was still breathing. His head throbbed from the impact of the crash. As soon as his vision cleared he saw two SPARTANS hovering above him and recognized them as Will-043 and Evan-049.

"Are you injured?" asked Will

"Noâ€| I'm fine." said the Chief standing up

He looked around the pod to see if there were any more survivors. Unfortunately, all of the soldiers were stiff as a diving board and they showed no signs of breathing. In other words; they were dead. The SPARTANS headed out of the pod only to find dozens of more corpses of UNSC marine soldiers along with health kits and weapons scattered around. Their arms and legs were twisted and their bones were shattered. A small pool of blood surrounded their heads like an angel with a halo. The Chief shook his head and sighed sadly.

"The othersâ€| the impact." said Cortana somberly

"There was nothing we've could've done." said Will

After a long pause, Cortana spoke again.

"Warning, I've detected multiple Covenant drop-ships approaching our current location."

"What direction are they coming from?" asked the Chief

"South I presume," said Cortana "I recommend immediate evasion."

"Alright men grab what you need to defend yourself and head on over to those hills." said the Chief to Will and Evan

"But we can take them!" said Evan

"There's too many of them. We would surely be dead shortly after the battle started," said the Chief "Until we find survivors, I'm not taking any chances. Now let's move!"

The three SPARTANS ran across the grassy foothills where the pod had

crashed and headed over toward a smooth, sturdy metal bridge that at first looked like it was stone. While crossing the bridge, Evan-049 glanced around his surroundings and saw a tall water fall and many pine trees that in a way reminded him of Earth. In fact, it reminded him of Earth so much that he just had to start a conversation about it.

"Hey, do any of you guys get the feeling that we're walking on a replica of Montana?" asked Evan

"Montana? I was thinking it was more like Jericho VII." said Cortana

"No, it kind of looks like Colorado." said Evan

"Colorado? Are you kidding me?" asked Cortana as the trio fully crossed the bridge

"Well, I know in the Rockies they got pine trees, mountains and whatever the hell is in Colorado."

"Have you ever even been to Colorado?"

"No, but I've seen pictures."

"Pictures? On what Google 29.2?"

"No, some UNSC Gunnery Sergeant I used to work with showed me some pictures of his kids on vacationâ€|"

While Cortana and Evan-049 were getting acquainted, Will-043, silent as the grave as usual, was looking out for any suspicious activity. So far, there were no signs of survivors or Covenant soldiers near by. Suddenly, he heard the roar of the engine of a drop-ship heading towards the crash site. They had already arrived.

"â€|So wait a minute, have you ever been to Colorado?" asked Evan

"Uh, well," said Cortana "No, I haven't."

"Then how would you know about-" started Evan

"Covenant drop-ships!" said Will

"Take cover!" ordered the Chief

The SPARTANS took cover behind the closest large rock near by at the bottom of a steep hill. A large, violet, Spirit-class Covenant drop-ship had soared over head and landed down by the crash site. Hordes of Grunts, Elites and Jackals poured out of the ship and began to search and destroy any survivors from the crash while the SPARTANS waited for the right time to move.

Thanks to the fact that his MJOLNIR armor has a neural interface that can allow the user to access communications, maps etc. mentally, the Chief turned the SQUADCOM on and off twice in order to get the other two SPARTANS attention. Once he did get their attention, the Chief instructed his comrades by making a series of hand signals.

'_Formation Beta_' said the hand signals '_Stay cool and stay hidden._'

Will and Evan nodded understanding the orders. Then one at a time, each SPARTAN moved from one rock or tree to another almost completely separated from each other. As soon as they got to the top of the hill they were on, they stopped hearing a noise echoing in the distance. The noise was rapid if not constant. The SPARTANs quickly exchanged glances at each other.

"An assault rifleâ€|?" said the Chief "Johnson and the other marines."

"I'm picking up a life boat beacon on the next hill. It's most likely that they're some survivors." said Cortana

"And with them, of course, some Covenant soldiers." added Will

"Alright, time for Operation: WEDDING CRASHERS," said the Chief reloading his gun "Let's go kick some Cove."

The SPARTANs followed the sounds of gunfire over to the next hill where a massive military base that appeared to be made of steel stood in the middle of a grassy field which was inside of what appeared to be a canyon. A _Spirit_-class Covenant drop-ship was parked in front of the base where the battle was being held. The blaring noises of gunfire from both human and Covenant sides were desperately trying to overlap each other. Bodies of dead soldiers that were covered in pools of their own blood were scattered everywhere across the field. Soldiers on both sides were running left and right, up and down shooting each other with whatever weaponry they had.

The SPARTANs quickly took action. Will pulled out his assault rifle and covered the Chief and Evan as they went straight into the battle field. The Chief pulled out his assault rifle as well while Evan pulled out two BR55 battle rifles. As they approached the field, many Covenant soldiers turned their attention away from the marines and began firing at the SPARTANs. As the bullets (or lasers so to speak) penetrated the Chief's armor shields, he began firing his assault rifle and took down several Brutes, Elites and Jackals. After dealing with them, he quickly looked around for any survivors while shooting at several Grunts who apparently were shooting at him.

Meanwhile, Will (who came into the battle just shortly after covering his comrades) was taking cover behind a bashed up UNSC _Warthog_ jeep searching his armor compartments for extra ammo but unfortunately he ran out. He saw a blood-stained rocket launcher lying in front of him with several unused rockets. He assumed that the person who was using it was shot in the hand and was forced to drop it. Will quickly picked it up, loaded it and looked from behind the _Warthog_ to see if he could find any targets.

It was then that Will-043 saw several Covenant _Banshees_ firing at Evan-049 and several surviving marines who were trying to best the Covenant's foot soldiers. Will carefully aimed the rocket launcher at one of the _Banshees_ which was moving at full speed. Will push the button on the top of the rocket launcher and watched as the rocket shot out of the launcher leaving behind a puffy trail of smoke. In a

matter of seconds after soaring through the air, the rocket had hit its designated target triggering a giant cloud of flames and smoke. The remains of the Banshee plummeted straight into the ground. Will took aim and fired again. One by one, the Banshees fell from the sky and crashed onto the field covered in flames and smoke.

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>About twenty minutes after the SPARTANs had joined in the battle, the battalion of Covenant soldiers were quickly defeated. The marines and SPARTANs quickly re-grouped and the celebration for their victory was short-lived; for there were important matters to be discussed.
<p>"Master Chief!" said a tall African-American marine known as Sergeant A.J. Johnson stepping to the front of the crowd "Would you mind telling me where the hell you've been?"<p>

"Long story," replied the Master Chief "What's our status?"

"It's a mess sir," said Johnson "The life boats are scattered all over this ring. While we were tryin' to call for evac, the Covenant ambushed us. Until you guys showed up I thought we were screwed big time."

"Any word from Captain Keyes?" asked the Chief

"Negative, sir," said Johnson "The damn sons of a bitches kidnapped him along with a few other survivors."

"Damn!" said the Chief "Alright everyone, here's the plan: when the evac plane comes, we're going to ask them to drop some Warthogs for us then we're going to go look for some survivors and get some answers as to what the hell is this place. Now, what're you waiting for? Grab some ammo and let's move!"

"Sir, yes sir!" replied the marines

4. Chapter 4

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Chapter 4

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>After several minutes of waiting for evac, a UNSC Pelican drop-ship came into view and someone from the UNSC was finally heard over the SQUADCOM.

"_This is Pelican Echo 419. Anyone read me? Any USNC personnel respond. Repeat, any USNC personnel respond._"

"_Roger, Echo 419,_" replied Johnson "_Fire Team Charlie Alpha here. We read you five by five. That you Foe?_"

"_Affirmative,_" said Foe Hammer "_Good to hear from ya, Charlie

Alpha._"

"_If you're not busy Foe, we could use some Warthogs,_" said Will
"_We think there may be some survivors out there and if we don't get to them soon, the Covenant's gonna have fried marine toast for breakfast._"

"_Roger that,_" said Foe Hammer who then deployed about eight or nine
Warthogs from the _Pelican_ (Several of them being personnel carriers) "_That should cover it. Good luck, Charlie Team. Foe Hammer, out._"

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>Meanwhile, on the Covenant flag ship the Ascendant Justiceâ€|

"Major, have you heard any news on the whereabouts of the Sacred Icon?" asked the Supreme Commander

"Negative, Supreme Commander," said the Major Domo Elite "However, we have received reports on multiple sightings of humans who have abandoned their ship on the Sacred Ring."

"Hmmmâ€| that is exactly what I feared. See to it that all of them are destroyed. We cannot allow them to find the Sacred Icon."

"Yes, sir."

The Supreme Commander then turned on the Battlenet-link and contacted another flag ship, the _Truth and Reconciliation_.

"_Commander, how is the interrogation going?_" he asked

"_Very well sir_, " said the Commander "_But however, some of them are still refusing to talk._."

"_And the tests that were performed on them?_"

"_The results are astounding! We have never seen such progress in ages!_"

"_Excellent, you may continue your research._"

"_Understood, sir._"

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>As the Marines were loading their supplies on the personnel carriers (just in case some of survivors were wounded), the Chief tapped his fingers on the hood of one of the Warthogs looking out into the horizons. It wasn't that he was impatient (however he was losing patience slowly); it seemed like he was more troubled than agitated. Memories of the Battle of Reach were flashed quickly through his mind one by one.

"Hey," said Cortana "You okay? You seem a bit, I don't know, edgy."

"I'm fine." said the Chief trying to hide his

apprehensiveness

"Really," said Cortana "You don't sound fine. Oh, I get it! You're just worried about losing your men again like on Reach aren't you?"

"I really don't want to talk about it."

"Chief, their deaths were not your fault. Nobody saw it coming. We were all taken by surprise. You shouldn't-"

"Will you put a megabyte in it, Cortana? I said I didn't want to talk about it. So shut it."

"Well so-rry. Just trying to cheer you up."

"Hey, Master Chief!" said Evan-49 "We're all packed up and ready to roll on your command, sir."

"Hold it, boy!" said Johnson "I have an important message for these green horns and by God I'm gonna give it to them! All soldiers front and center!"

"Yes sir!" said the marines lining up by the side of a _Warthog_ which Johnson was standing in

"What's he doing?" asked Evan

"It's one of his 'inspirational speeches'," said the Master Chief "He gives them out frequently just to keep the troops in high spirits."

"Alright jarheads, pay attention 'cause I'm only gonna say this once," announced Johnson "Men, we have followed those dumb asses to the middle of nowhere and we've stumbled across something they're so hot for, they're just scramblin' over each other just to smell it. Once again, here is where we show those baby-Kong, squid head bastards that they could not have picked a worse enemy than the human race! Now, I don't care if this ring is God's own personnel anti-son-of-a-bitch machine, a giant hula hoop or a giant, floating engagement ring, we're not gonna let 'em have it! What we _are_ going to let them have is an ass full of lead and a pool of their own blood to drown in while we tear their spines from their skulls and toss them away laughin'! Am I right, marines?!"

"Sir, yes sir!" replied the marines

"Uh-huh, damn right I am," said Johnson "Now move it out! Double time!"

The marines and SPARTANs then saddled up in their _Warthogs_ and drove off eastward hoping to find more survivors. For the first what felt like fifteen minutes all there was, was nothing but endless yards of grassy hills accompanied by pine trees that were scattered about and large canyon walls that were so high that it was as if it was made to keep something in and everything else out. After driving over five miles the humans came across what was probably the most strangest cave they've ever came across. For it wasn't any natural stone cave; it was an obscure cave that was made of pure, hard steel.

"There's something odd about these caves." commented Will-43 as the marines and SPARTANs drove through the cave

"I agree," coincided Cortana "These caves weren't made by natural forces. Someone or something built them."

"But where there's a tunnel, there's always a way out," said the Chief "Keep your eyes peeled."

The steel paved caves were like an impossible maze. Almost everywhere they turned it was a dead end. The humans tried splitting up to see which path would lead them out of the cave but in a matter of minutes they all met back in the same place as if they went around in a circle. It was nothing but a labyrinth of steel.

"I'm picking up strange frequency signals," said Cortana suddenly "They're Covenant channels alright but they seem to be unencrypted."

"What?" asked Evan-049

"Those bastards." muttered Will

"They don't have a damn clue who they're dealing with!" said Johnson

"Can you detect them?" asked the Chief

"What?" asked Cortana "I'm sorry, but do you want them to find us."

"Correction," said the Chief "I want us to find them. If the Covenant found another way in then that means there's a way out of here after all. Now tell me, can you or can you not detect them?"

"Well," said Cortana "I can try"

"Good," said the Chief "Everyone, follow me."

With the Master Chief leading the way, Cortana attempted to guide the soldiers through the steel-like labyrinth to the Covenant platoon inside the cave as well. The Chief was driving the Warthog too fast that the other drivers had to slam the pedals to full speed in order to catch up with him. They figured that he was getting a little excited for another battle against the enemy. But that wasn't what was bugging the Chief. Memories of the Battle of Reach flooded his mind so frequently that it just made him both enraged and melancholy.

"Hey, Chief!" said Cortana "You wanna watch your speed there? You could get us killed!"

After making a quick, sharp turn to the right, the soldiers (with the Chief still in the front of the squad) saw the entrance to a strange new hallway and blocking it was an Elite wielding a large fuel rod cannon. Calmly, the Elite aimed it directly at the Chief's Warthog and then pulled the trigger.

(AN: Just to let you know, if I apologize for not updating so soon. I will try to update as soon as I can so please DO NOT rush me.)

5. Chapter 5

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><p>Chapter 5***

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>As soon as the Elite fired the fuel rod cannon, a massive explosion came at the front of the Chief's Warthog. The _Warthog_ flipped over the Elite into the next room and rolled violently once it came in contact with the ground. As soon as it came to a stop, the Chief could see and hear the marines swerving around the Covenant firing their machine guns or whatever weapon they had in their hands. The sounds of gunshots, yelling, death cries and car tires screeching against the titanium floor all echoed through out his mind. He forced himself up even though he was about to fall unconscious. He didn't look or feel injured so he grabbed a near by MA5K assault rifle which still had ammo inside and helped fight off the Covenant as memories of the Battle of Reach flashed through his mind under no circumstances.

* * *

>The Pelican drop ship flew over the ruins of the city of Reach partially covered in glass and fire. On the ground, were the echoes of gunshots being fired down below and above them, were the bright yellow spheres of explosions from battle ships past the maroon colored clouds. The Master Chief looked out from the Pelican cringing at what he was about to do. The actions he was about to take would result in possibly thousands of casualties.

"_Sir, there's way too many of them," said a young SPARTAN "Are you sure this will work?"_

"_It'll have to, 734," said the Master Chief "Otherwise, we're all doomed."_

"_But what about the others?" asked 734 "What will happen to them?"_

"_Iâ€|" replied the Chief uncertainly "I don't know."_

"_Well there must be something we can do!" snapped 734 angrily "We can't just let them all die out there! I can't believe you would allow this to happen to your own men! I thought you were better than that! I-"_

"_The Chief became extremely irritated. He had had enough of this criticism. He abruptly grabbed the SPARTAN by the chest and slammed him into the wall aggressively. 734 shut his mouth in shock and looked at him like he had gone completely mad._

"_Don't think I'm doing this because it looks fun!" retorted the Chief "War isn't just about winning or losing, dammit! It's about protecting our homes from god forsaken bastards like the Covenant! If

any of those soldiers down there were in my position, they would do the same. This plan will prevent the Covenant from discovering Earth which will save millions of lives. Sometimes, you have to make the greatest sacrifices just to protect many innocent peopleâ€| even if it means sacrificing your own life, or someone else's."_

The Chief dropped the SPARTAN and went back to looking out of the Pelican. His fellow comrades all glanced at each other and at the Chief with concern. However he didn't seem to notice; he seemed more focused on the scenery than his men.

* * *

>"WHOA! Hey, Chief, watch where you're aiming that thing!" shouted Johnson <p>The Chief realized that while he was fighting (and apparently lost in his memories) he had almost shot Johnson. He snapped out of it and aimed his gun at a group of Jackals. He managed to take down at least four of them within what felt like ten seconds. Will-043 took care of the remaining three that the Chief was shooting at. Once they had fallen the Chief quickly looked around to make sure he wasn't being fired at.<p>

"Chief, Elite attacking at six o'clock!" said Cortana

He spun around and shot at a major domo Elite penetrating his armor. Blue electricity emitted all over his body from his personal energy shield. In reaction, the Elite fired back causing the Chief to also emit static from his personal energy shield. As his shield was being insinuated, he ran up to the Elite and smacked him across the face with the back of his gun crevassing his skull. Once the marines and the SPARTANS had finished the fight, there was a moment of silence as the echoes of gunfire quickly died down.

"Yaaaah! Which one of you goddamn Covenant son-of-a-bitches wanna take us on _next_, huh?!" cheered an energetic Johnson who immediately broke the silence

No one replied.

"Heh, didn't think so." added Johnson

"Sergeant Major," said one of the privates who was standing by a panel "You might want to see thisâ€|"

Johnson walked over by the private and examined the panel. It had strange alien buttons with some sort of a foreign language on it. The language looked like a mix of hieroglyphs, Arabic and Greek writing all blended in together like some sort of a curvy, pictogram-like complicated language. In the middle of the panel was a small, glowing, milky white square shaped button. Johnson glanced at the private in confusion.

"What is it?" asked Johnson

"I don't know, sir," said the private "But whatever its purpose is, it involves something big."

"Yeah," added the Chief who also came over and looked "Something big and explosive. The Covenant probably had set up a bomb that they forgot to activate. And judging by the big gap in front of us, I say

we head back and try to find another route."

"Hold on a sec," uttered Evan-049 walking over "How can say for sure whether this is a bomb or not?"

"Come again?" asked the Chief

"What I mean is," explained Evan "What if it isn't a bomb? What if it's like a device that brings up a bridge or something?"

"So what you're saying isâ€|"

"What I'm saying is, let's press that button and see what this baby can do!"

"Wait, Evan!"

"Relax; I was deemed the 'most accurate' out of class three!"

"That's not the point. Get back here!"

However, Evan ignored the Chief's orders.

"Evan! That's an order! Are you even listening, dammit?"

"You know, if I were you, I'd march my ass right back over there before Helmet Boy here blows a fuse." advised Cortana

"Aw, come on guys," said Evan carelessly "What's the worst that can happen?"

The very moment that Evan pushed the button, a ticking noise was heard all across the room. At first, its pace was slow but it got quicker as the moment passed by. To everyone, this noise meant only one logical explanation.

"Huh, I guess it really is a bomb." said Evan

Johnson and the Chief immediately took action and started giving out orders telling everyone to back up and take cover. Everyone put their _Warthogs_ in reverse and backed out of the room while the soldiers on foot followed close behind. As soon as they got out of range, the soldiers waited until the explosion had passedâ€| but it didn't come. Instead, there appeared a long, blue platform of energy over the gap the Chief had just mentioned before connecting the ledge on their side and the ledge on the other side like a bridge.

"It's okay, boys!" informed Johnson to the marines "False alarm!"

"Well, would you look at that," muttered the Chief "It really was a bridge after all."

He then turned to Evan-049.

"Don't ever disobey like that me again," he said "'Cause you could've gotten us all killed. Got it?"

"Sir! Yes, sir!" replied Evan

* * *

>He tapped his fingers gently on his plasma rifle as he moved through the dark, vague swamp with his troops. The Supreme Commander and his men were searching for the crash site of the Truth and Reconciliation since they have not contacted them in about twelve hours or so as they said they would. At first he thought that the humans probably got them or that their communications systems might've malfunctioned. But deep down, he had a feeling that something far worse might have happenedâ€¦ something horrifyingly unimaginable. But he simply cast these thoughts out of his mind and ignored them.

The Supreme Commander turned his head to see a couple of Unggoy (Grunts) squabbling with some Kig-Yar (Jackals) about who knows (or even cares) what. Why the two races were always bickering he would never know. Suddenly, one of Unggoy, who wasn't paying attention to where he was going, crashed into a near by exotic tree. After quickly recovering from it, he dashed to catch up with his fellow kin. The Supreme Commander sighed and shook his head; another day, another moment of stupidity caused by the Unggoy.

"Supreme Commander 'Insosamee," said a SpecOps Officer Sangheili (Elite) approaching the Supreme Commander "We have located the _Truth and Reconciliation_. It is being searched now as we speak."

"Excellent," said 'Insosamee "Tell your commander to round up his men at once."

"Yes, sir." said the SpecOps Officer

6. Chapter 6

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Chapter 6

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>"I've found the location to Keyes' whereabouts over the Covenant battlenet." said Cortana <p>"Go on." said the Chief who was driving the Warthog while leading the marines and SPARTANs through the steel labyrinth

"According to several reports," started Cortana "Keyes and several other men are being held on a Covenant cruiser that I disabled. It's called the _Truth and Reconciliation_. Where it is at this moment, I'm not sure. But what I do know is that we need to bail the captain out ASAP."

"Well then, it looks like we need to get started don't we?" smirked the Chief

The moment that the Master Chief said this, they were led directly out of the cave and into a grassy field. The sunshine blinded everyone after being in the dark for so long. However, the light wasn't strong enough to make someone crash (although someone did drive a bit off course). Finally, they had escaped from the never ending labyrinth. Now all they needed to do was to find the rest of the surviving marines and SPARTANs before the Covenant eliminated them like pigs to the slaughter.

It was then, that several vehicles in the distance were approaching the party. It was hard to say if they were UNSC or Covenant aligned for it was too far to identify the vehicles and drivers and passengers inside. A voice then came on to the SQUAD-COM and whistled a six note, seven beat tone that only the Master Chief, Evan-049, Will-043, Johnson and Cortana recognized; it was the SPARTAN code "Oly Oly Oxen Free".

"_Read you loud and clear,_" replied the Chief "_Good to see you still in one piece._"

"_Same with you guys._" said the voice who whistled "Oly Oly Oxen Free" who just so happened to be Fred-104

As the _Warthogs_ got closer to each other and were about to group up, the unpredictable happened. Seven Covenant _Spirit_ drop-ships appearing at first shadows overhead came out of nowhere and started firing their plasma cannons at the humans. The neon green bolts of plasma struck down at the ground attempting to blow the _Warthogs_ into oblivion. The _Warthogs_ swerved and scattered in many directions trying to avoid their line of fire. This caused two _Warthogs_ to collide into each other by accident. A third _Warthog_ was shot in the trunk which not only resulted in a huge explosion, but it also resulted in causing the vehicle to flip over another _Warthog_. After a few minutes of being under fire, the Covenant ceased fire. As the drop-ships began deploying their troops, most of the _Warthogs_ pulled over and began doing the same thing grabbing whatever weapons they had and silently praying to God that they would survive this fight. As soon as the men were out in the battlefield ready to lock and load, they all charged at each other and opened fire while the _Warthogs_, _Ghosts_, _Banshees_ and _Specters_ all drove around shooting at whatever foot soldier or vehicle that wasn't theirs.

* * *

>The soldiers of the Covenant had finally reached the crash site of the Truth and Reconciliation. It didn't seem too badly damaged. Sure there were some dents and missing bits here and there, but other than that, it still seemed to be in pretty good shape. 'Insosamee (the Supreme Commander) and several of his men approached a couple of Sangheili SpecOps members standing by the door making sure that no one comes in or out of the ship (unless of course it is someone of their team or someone with a higher rank).

"Supreme Commander!" exclaimed one SpecOps member surprised

"The commander is awaiting your arrival inside, sir." said the other SpecOps member

"Very good," said 'Insosamee "You two stay put and be on the lookout

for humans."

"Sir!" replied both SpecOps

When 'Insosamee's party entered the _Truth and Reconciliation_, their findings were more appalling than one could imagine. There were splashes of cyan, red, purple, dark blue and orange blood covering the walls and floors along with claw marks and scorch marks. They slowly walked in chatting amongst themselves about the ghastly scenery. As they continued through the halls, the rooms became more gruesome than the last; in fact, in one room, a Minor Domo Sangheili felt a drop of blood fall on his shoulder, looked up and realized that a Sangheili was pinned to the ceiling with an energy sword.

When they reached the bridge, they found two SpecOps officers and their commander known as Rtas 'Vadumee. They were discussing the matter on the horrible sight that was before them. Hearing them enter, the SpecOps members turned to the party at attention. 'Insosamee looked around at the room. There were bodies of Covenant members scattered everywhere each with their own grotesque looking corpse. Dammit, he hated when his instincts were right.

"What happened here?" he asked

"We are not sure, Supreme Commander," answered Rtas "But we think that there must've been a massacre on board. Judging what became of the crew, the battle didn't seem to be started by humans. Usually they are not this barbaric."

"Hmm," said 'Insosamee "If it wasn't the humans, then what was it?"

His question was answered with a disturbing growl whose owner was yet to be seen. Everyone readied their weapons looking around the room wildly. The noise grew louder and closer at each passing moment. Finally, the source of the growling showed its true form. From around the corner appeared a deformed human with yellow-ish green skin, puffy arms and legs and small tentacles sticking out of several parts of its body. Its neck was snapped revealing a tentacle and a pulmonary artery sticking out and spewing out drops of blood. Everyone stared at the monstrosity in shock and disgust.

"What is _that_?" asked an Ultra Sangheili

"The Floodâ€¦!" whispered 'Vadumee

"Everyone, stand your ground," ordered 'Insosamee "Do not fire until I give the signal."

The abomination slowly moved forward sniffing the air checking to see if these strange sentient beings were edible enough for food. They _looked_ edible. They _smelled_ edible. Now all that remains is that if they _taste_ edible. Using the memory of the host it possessed, it drew out what the humans called a M7 SMG and aimed it at the beings before him.

"It's got a weapon!" cried one Sangheili

"Open fire!" commanded 'Insosamee instantly

The Covenant pulled the triggers on their weapons unleashing a flurry of plasma bullets at the creature. Its body shook as it was being penetrated by the wave and its sickly green blood splattered on the floor. When the Covenant ceased fire, the creature collapsed onto the floor, dead. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence creeping around the room; like as if something was still lurking in the shadows.

"So, this is the Flood," remarked 'Insosamee "What vile parasitesâ€|"

"Sir, we have discovered a survi-" started a SpecOps officer walking into the room with his search party who was cut off when he saw the sight of the dead Flood form

"Go on." said 'Vadumee to the dumbstruck SpecOps officer

"Ah, yes, we have discovered a survivor on board," said the SpecOps officer "But unfortunately, it's human."

One of soldiers brought up a tall human male that appeared to be in his fifties or sixties. He was wearing a grey marine captain uniform with several medals decorated on the jacket. He had dark eyes and grey-ish black hair along with a slightly grim expression across his face. It was Captain Jacob Keyes; former leader of the UNSC ship, the Pillar of Autumn.

"Tell me," asked the Supreme Commander to Keyes with a look of resentment "What has become of the members of my fleet?"

"What do you think?" replied Keyes "These things came out of nowhere and killed everyone on board."

"But it just so happens that you survived," commented 'Insosamee "How?"

"Hell if I know," said Keyes "They didn't even bother coming after me. I guess they liked me better than the crew."

'Insosamee then remembered something. He was informed by the High Council of the Covenant that a group of scientists were working on a genetic experiment involving sentient beings as test subjects supposedly hoping that if it was successful, it would help with their goal of beginning the Great Journey and was ordered to let them proceed until the scientists came up with a final analysis. He wasn't given the information on what they were experimenting with but still; he wonderedâ€|

"Were you ever part of an experiment while you were on board?"

"Excuse me?" asked Keyes

"You heard me," said 'Insosamee coldly "Were you ever part of an experiment on board?"

"None of your business."

"It is EVERY part of my business!" shouted 'Insosamee grabbing Keyes

by the throat, choking him "As long as you are in our custody, you will answer all of my questions whether you want to or not. So if I were you, I would answer the question. That is, if you want to skip to the part where I torture you."

* * *

>"Shit! How many people did they bring?" asked Fred-104 frantically shooting at the numerous Grunts charging at him

"I would say aboutâ€¦" said Will-043 who was busy trying to nuke several _Banshees_ with a rocket launcher from behind an empty _Warthog_ beside Fred "Two hundred and ten."

"Damn!" commented Evan-049 who was sitting right next to Will, reloading his shotgun

"Well, two hundred and ten if you're counting casualties that is." added Will

The future wasn't looking so bright for the humans. They were outnumbered and outmatched (technology wise) by the Covenant brigade. No one was sure that they were going to survive this fight. It was just too difficult to undertake a situation like this. Their only option was to retreatâ€¦ but they didn't. Why? Because deep down, they believe that they had a fighting chance. They believed that victory was somewhere out there. It may have been a foolish decision to stay and fight but they weren't giving up on hope just yet.

The Master Chief barrel rolled out of the way of a _Ghost_'s firing range and behind a battered up _Warthog_ on its side. He quickly reloaded his M6C pistol, looked out and shot at several Elites, two of them who were manning a _Specter_. He managed to hit one in the shoulder and the other in the head (the second one would've been dead if it weren't for his energy shields). He also took down a few Grunts and Jackals too who just so happened to be in his line of fire. Why is it that they were always the easiest to take down?

"Dammit, this battle is going nowhere," muttered Cortana "If we don't retreat soon, we'll all beâ€¦ Chief, behind you!"

The Chief hastily turned around to take out a Minor Domo Elite but before he could fire his weapon, the Elite fell down to the ground dead with several bullets in his head. This left the Chief in puzzlement. He hadn't even fired his weapon and it was already dead?

"_Hey,_" said a voice on the SQUAD-COM "_You still alive there, Johnny?_"

He knew that voice. But that was impossible. She was still in a cryogenic pod at the time of the _Autumn_'s attack. How is it that she was still awake? More importantly, how can she still be walking around in her current condition? She was severely wounded when she, the Chief and Johnson boarded the _Autumn_. It just couldn't be herâ€¦ could it?

When the Chief noticed that a Brute was about to attack him from the side. Suddenly, a _Ghost_ driven by a SPARTAN in violet purple armor tackled the Brute in mid air forcing it to drop to the ground. The

Chief could've sworn that he heard a large crack at the moment of impact. The SPARTAN hopped off the _Ghost_, pulled out an MA5C assault rifle and shot down several Elites who had just turned around when they heard her collide with the Brute. She then rested her assault rifle on her shoulder and looked at the Master Chief.

"You know, you should really be more aware of your surroundings." she said

"Lindaâ€¦?" asked the Chief

7. Chapter 7

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Chapter 7

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>Linda-058 nodded her head conformingly. She then put away her assault rifle and hopped onto the Ghost.

"Need a ride?" she asked

"Sure," said the Chief "But can it fit two people?"

"I think it should work." said Linda

"Is she your girlfriend or something?" asked Cortana flatly yet threateningly

"Hell no." replied the Chief

The Chief sat on the back of the _Ghost_ which surprisingly did fit two people. He pulled out a machine gun as Linda started driving. He desperately tried to shoot but he just couldn't concentrate due to the speed that Linda was driving at (which was approximately more than a hundred and twenty miles per hour). There was only one word that was echoing through out his mind: shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! SHIT! SHIIIIIIIT! He honest to God thought they were going to crash and die if Linda kept up this speed. Not only that but he was having a frustrating time aiming his gun at the people he wanted to kill. You think she would slow down, but nooooo.

"Hey Linda," he shouted "Can you slow down a bit? I can't aim very well!"

"No problem!" shouted Linda slowing down to a reasonable drive-'n-shoot speed

Well, that was much better. He then swiftly aimed and fired his gun at two Elites driving a _Specter_. He killed the Elite in the gunner's seat once his energy shield died down. After that he nailed the one in the driver's seat. After an hour of shooting at the Covenant soldiers manning their vehicles, the two SPARTANs realized

that if they were going to end this battle quickly, they would need a faster-killing weapon; a rocket launcher.

Fortunately, they knew where they could find one. Evan just so happened to be holding one near by. Linda drove the _Ghost_ towards Evan and just when they were passing him, the Chief grabbed it from out of his hands leaving Evan weaponless. Evan's reaction was both shocked and offended.

"Hey!" shouted Evan

"_Sorry! We need it!_" said Cortana over the SQUAD-COM

"Did it slip out of your hands or did you let them take it from you while your mind was in La-La land?" asked Johnson who was standing right next to Evan and Mikayla

"What?"

Johnson and Mikayla-625 laughed.

"Shut up, Johnson," spat Evan "And Mikayla, don't encourage him."

"Whatever you say, Butterfingers!" laughed Johnson

The Chief and Linda sped around on a _Ghost_ shooting down their enemies with a rocket launcher disposing of them more effectively. Following a huge explosion that looked like a flaming bush, one by one they flew five feet in the air, dropped down like dead flies and laid there as stiff as bones. As the moments went by and the Covenant casualties went flying, the Master Chief felt that very soon, victory would belong to the humans. Unfortunately, that was the moment that the Chief ran out of rockets.

A _Banshee_ had suddenly damaged their engines causing them to crash into a huge rock, sending the two flying off of the _Ghost_ and behind the rock. Luckily, no one was injured. They both backed against the wall of the rock and prepared their weapons for battle on the ground.

"Damn, woman, you may be a SPARTAN, but you're driving is terrible!" remarked the Chief

"Hey, at least _I_ can parallel park." replied Linda

The Chief looked at Linda plaintively.

* * *

>They were here at last; the control center of the Truth and Reconciliation. 'Insosamee and the others searched the entire ship for this place while bumping into the Flood on occasion (losing several men in the process). 'Insosamee walked up the main computer with its blood-stained screen and began punching in some of the keys hoping to uncover to information as to how the Flood came to attack the ship. Some flashing letters popped up on the screen. They appeared to be part of a journal of some sort. The entries were written by a Sangheili oracle master named Yusondi 'Xeresro. This is what was written on the journal:

September 10

Ninth Age of Reclamation

3:49 PM

Entry #2385

_Our mission has begun thanks to the Prophets' blessing. Our (my team and I) goal is to create the perfect super soldier consisting of the unique genetic DNA of a Parasite and of another sentient being. What had inspired me to perform such a task were, oddly enough, the Demons that the humans call "Spartans". According to our autopsies, their bodies were compromised of enhanced DNA. This made me wonderâ€|what if we were to create these kinds of soldiers only ten times stronger? I am determined to uncover the answer. It all starts here, on the Truth and Reconciliation. _

September 18

Ninth Age of Reconciliation

_2:52 AM _

Entry #2386

We have begun testing with Flood DNA on various volunteers on the ship. All of them (each being members of each race) quickly died as a reaction to the serum of DNA we injected them with. Things are becoming more difficult than I predicted. If we do not find some new test subjects soon, the experiment will be cancelled and we will never be able to outmatch the Demons! Sometimes, I wonder if we are being intentionally smitten by the Gods.

September 19

Ninth Age of Reclamation

2:15 AM

Entry #2387

Splendid news! Although we have crashed on the Sacred Ring and are not able to leave until repairs are made, the warriors aboard the ship were so kind enough as to lend some humans that they captured while raiding one of their ships. The Gods have answered my prayers! We shall immediately proceed with our experiment. Let's pray that they won't die just when the serum is inserted.

September 19

_Ninth Age of Reclamation _

3:12 AM

Entry #2388

_Praise the Forerunners! The results so far are astounding! So far, the human genes and the Parasite genes (With the generous help of the

Huragoks' technology) have been combined and are now starting to take affect. According to the data we've collected, the humans' speed and strength have increased greatly. Very soon now, the Demons will be bested in their own game! _

September 19

Ninth Age of Reclamation

3:45 AM

Entry #2389

The project continues to progress greatly but with a few side effects. Most of them have developed a bit of a temper and have a knack for making strange beastly noises. But this is the least of our concerns now. What matters the most is that the experiment becomes successful without any flaws. I will send some soldiers to break their spirits later. But for now, we watch and wait.

September 19

Ninth Age of Reclamation

5:57 AM

_Entry #2390 _

I was just awoken when I heard the news. The humans' strength, speed, stamina, everythingâ€¦ it has grown tenfold. This makes me a little restless because they weren't supposed to this superior. I feel a strange sense of anxiety hovering over me like a cloud. But, however, I should cast off these feelings. I am probably just tired. I think I'll go back to sleep and deal with the abnormalities later.

_September 19 _

Ninth Age of Reclamation

1:06 PM

Entry #2391

By the Prophets, what is happening? Some of the humansâ€¦ instead of being both human AND parasite, they'veâ€¦ completely transformed into a Parasite! But how; how could this have happened? To make matters worse, they have summoned their own brethren onto the ship. I do not know how long we can survive this crisis. There are many of them and about a third of the troops have either been infected or killed. Is there any hope in stopping this madness?

September 19

Ninth Age of Reclamation

2:31 PM

Entry #2392

_I am afraid that this is my final entry. As far as I know, I am the only survivor on this ship. The other troops have left me alone on the bridge to go fight the Parasite. I assume they're deadâ€¦ or worse. I do not have much time left. To those who finds this journal, to anyone who is on this ring and still aliveâ€¦ please, I beg of you, for the sake of the Covenant, abandon this Sacred Ring. Leave now while you still can. The Flood is not something to be tolerated. They will find and destroy you all. Take my word for it. Do not Fi
.sopgnpw[R4skfs[se033jfjf3999992nmoqej.ersergf erfw_

'Insosamee could hardly believe what he was reading. Those poor foolsâ€¦ they have tampered with the Flood and as a result, were destroyed. He wished that he could take the oracle master's advice but he couldn't. The Great Journey was within their grasp now and those who would dare turn this glorious opportunity down would be considered ludicrous. Besides, what can a measly swarm of Flood possibly do?

Suddenly, a massive swarm of squid-like monsters came pouring out of the vents in the ship. The Covenant immediately aimed and fired their guns at the strange creatures knowing somehow that they were related to the Floodâ€¦ in fact they _were_ the Flood. Great; he just had to ask.

8. Chapter 8

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Chapter 8

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>"Plasma grenade!!!" cried a Marine who saw the grenade fall onto the ground next to him <p>The marines, including the SPARTAN, Mikayla-625, immediately jumped out from behind a large rock they were using as a bunker. As soon as they immediately got away from the grenade as far as they could, it exploded into a flurry of light blue flames engulfing about five marines in the process. After taking a small look at the explosion, Mikayla grabbed her BR55 battle rifle and sprinted across the battlefield.<p>

She ran around shooting Brutes and Elites who didn't notice her square in the head. This gave her a complete advantage because of her size since she was the smallest human soldier in the battle. Since she was short compared to the older SPARTANs (yet in the average height for a SPARTAN her age), this made the Brutes, Hunters and Elites hard to identify her since they were focusing on the older humans. However, one of the disadvantages was that the Drones, Grunts and Jackals could spot her easily making her a target. Damn, sometimes she hated being short.

She jumped up onto a Brute's back and shot it in the head his blood spilling down his head and chest. She quickly hopped off the Brute before his body could collapse to the ground. She looked around to find anymore Covenant soldiers that needed to be "taken care of".

Mikayla saw a couple of Grunts passing by and clobbered one in the head with a grenade which exploded a split second after.

"_This is Pelican Marco 509,_" said someone on the SQUAD-COM "_Anyone read me, over?_"

Mikayla knew that voice anywhere.

"_This is SPARTAN-625._ _Read you loud and clear, Marco,_" replied Mikayla "_It's good to hear your voice, Kelly._"

"_Same with you,_" said Kelly-087 "_How you doing kiddo?_"

"_Uh, fine; unless you wanna count being mutilated by the Covenant. Mind lending a hand over here?_"

"_No problem. Marco 509, out._"

Moments later a _Pelican_ came flying in attempting to take out as many Covenant drop-ships as possible with their machine guns. They kept firing while the ship was lowered to about twenty feet from the ground, opened the hull and out came dozens of ropes. Sliding down the ropes were a group of marines and two SPARTANs one wearing pink armor and the other wearing blue armor. The squad got into formation and on the pink SPARTAN's orders open fired. Eventually, the squad was ordered to scatter and attack any Covenant soldier in sight.

The pink SPARTAN, Kelly-087, and the blue SPARTAN teamed up together and ran around gunning down any enemy they saw. Kelly shot a Brute in the head with his back turned to her using both M7 SMGs in her hands. She then punched down a Jackal and shot him until he stopped moving. The blue SPARTAN (wielding a flamethrower) ignited his weapon unleashing a long chain of flames engulfing any enemy in range. The bodies that were swallowed by the flames were either lying on the ground or running around screaming in pain.

An Elite suddenly snatched the flamethrower out of the blue SPARTAN's hands, used it as a club to knock him in the chest and sent him sprawling on his back. The SPARTAN then immediately stood up pulling out an M6D magnum pistol and shot the Elite ten times which made him fall to the ground dead (six shots to power down the shields and another four shots to kill it).

* * *

>Sweat ran down all sides of his head. His lungs were nearly about to burst from running constantly; but he wasn't going to stop.

'Insosamee dashed through the hallways of the Parasite-conquered Truth and Reconciliation shooting whatever Parasite got in his way. After only fifteen minutes of combating the Flood on the bridge, he had ordered his men to retreat since there were far too many of them. He also told them to leave him behind saying that he would catch up eventually which would explain why his men weren't with him at that moment.

As he got to the end of the hallway, 'Insosamee turned into the next hallway on his right and backed against the wall to catch his breath. He checked the ammo on his plasma pistols; both of their batteries were almost dead and he was out of superheated plasma battery units. He could just waste the batteries now and use his energy sword

instead but this would make him more vulnerable at close range since there are about a thousand Flood forms chasing after him. One false move at close range, and they would be literally all over him.

He searched the compartments in his armor to see if he still had any battery units left; there were none. But, hello, what was this; he had found a plasma grenade which could be quite useful for him; apparently it was the only one he had. He jumped out of his hiding spot, chucked the grenade at a combat form (which stuck perfectly), turned and raced down the hall. As he kept running, he listened as the grenade exploded. He smirked; fools.

He went through the nearest door he could find and found himself inside the port-side aft shuttle bay where a battle was being ensued. He saw at least four of his men out on the battlefield where many corpses were scattered throughout the entire aft. Two of them were firing from behind a few large storage containers and the other two were making sure that the Flood didn't come around and attack them from behind. The human captain they found was bounded with handcuffs and placed up against the boxes ordered to stay still and be silent. 'Insosamee was relieved to see that some of his men had survived. He darted across the shuttle bay shooting at every Parasite he saw. He ceased fire once he had reached his fellow Sangheili and took cover.

"Good to see you are still breathing, Commander." said
'Insosamee

"Supreme Commander!" exclaimed Rtas surprised that his superior had survived

"What is our present situation?"

"Two more of our men have fallen, sir. Besides you, it's just
'Sraomee, 'Anonmee, 'Koralamee and myself."

"And the bad news?"

"There are still too many Parasites. I do not know how much longer we can hold them off. Oh, and just now they got a brute shot."

"Brilliant."

Just perfect, a brute shot; a Jiralhanae's (Brute) best friend. Respectively known for the heavy damage it inflicts, it's no wonder why they love it so much. It is often used anytime there is a "pest control problem" with the humans when there's too many of them (although they'll often be used on small groups anyway). It can take apart a human vehicle with ease in just one shot (that is, if you aim it carefully). The team had to be extra careful if they were going to get out of this situation.

'Insosamee studied the juggernaut form with one of its tentacles wrapped around the brute shot carefully. A plan had quickly concocted in the depths of his mind. He reached into the compartment inside of his right leg armor. He pulled out a necklace decorated with three large amber beads and three large yellow beads lined up in a pattern starting with the first amber bead and then the first yellow bead. Between the second and fifth beads were two capacious bear-like claws

that showed an ethereal glow of white that was the exact same color of one of the moons back home on Sangheilios. The thread was pure black and its material felt very similar to leather. He fiddled with the necklace in one hand restlessly. It used to belong to his son who often wore it as a good luck charm. He gave it to 'Insosamee so it would help him anytime he was in serious trouble.

'_Do you think it can work?_' thought 'Insosamee looking at the necklace deep in thought

The claws shimmered once from the reflection of the beams from the plasma rifles being fired. Whenever it did that, it meant yes. 'Insosamee put the necklace back in his leg compartment and closed it tight. He turned to 'Vadumee and smiled deviously which meant that he had a possibly insane plan that deep down, he knew that the SpecOps Commander would enjoy.

"You would not happen to have any grenades, would you?" asked the Supreme Commander

"What did you have in mind?" smiled 'Vadumee who seemed to have read 'Insosamee's thoughts

"Cover me," said 'Insosamee spotting a near by particle beam rifle next to the corpse of a Kig-Yar whose stomach seemed to be cut open "Then I shall tell you."

He then sprung out from cover, drew out his plasma pistols and began firing and running as the others gave him some cover fire to keep the other Parasites off of his back (both literally and figuratively). 'Insosamee was firing at all of the Flood combat forms that tried to attack him, their dark sickly green blood splattering all over the floor. By the time he was half way there, the batteries in his pistols had run out of energy. Thinking fast, he tossed the pistols away and pulled out his energy sword, its blade glowing fuchsia pink with a hint of blue.

On he went slicing and dicing through the seemingly squishy flesh of the Flood, the infection and carrier forms exploding into a misty cloud of what might've been their blood releasing a foul stench that smelled something like moldy tuna. Suddenly, he saw a plasma grenade about to fall on him. He immediately dodged it and kept on running as the grenade exploded behind him. 'Insosamee suddenly caught sight of the same Flood juggernaut wielding the brute shot; it had learned how to use it. He started to sprint, dodging all of the other grenade it had fired.

When he reached it, he had to do a barrel-roll to grab it just so he wouldn't get shot in the head. He checked the ammo on the particle beam rifle; there was only was shot left. He checked back on the juggernaut and it seemed to have run out of plasma grenades for the weapon. But the worst wasn't over yet. It could still use the blade on the front or its claws (whichever seemed to kill faster).

"Warriors," commanded 'Insosamee "Unleash your grenades!"

The three SpecOps personnel and the Ultra each threw a plasma grenade at the juggernaut form's arm where it was holding its weapon. After they stuck, the grenades each detonated and exploded one at time

leaving nothing but a stub on its arm with blood spilling out like pouring water into a sink. The Parasite roared in agony. 'Insosamee hastily readied the rifle. The beast, in a fit of rage, began to walk towards him, swinging its only tentacle violently. He began to feel a bit jumpy but didn't show it; he only had one shot at this. If he missed, then there would no other chance of killing that thing. The thought of this made his heart pound against his chest rapidly. He aimed it carefully and when he felt ready he pulled the trigger. A thin, light purple beam came flying out of the rifle and forced its way through the juggernaut's head (at that time it was about five feet away from 'Insosamee). Blood came spewing out of its head as it let out a pitiful growl. In a matter of seconds, the Flood form fell to the ground dead.

Then, the oddest thing happened. At the sight of their juggernaut dead, the Flood slowly began to leave the room like as if it was retreating. The Sangheili found themselves staring in confusion. Why would the Flood retreat if they had more numbers? After all, it seemed like they were winning. But deep down, the lance already knew the answer.

"We did it!" cheered N'tho 'Sraomee "We won! We-"

"No," interrupted the Ultra named 'Koralamee "We have only angered them. They are merely regrouping."

After a slight pause, a noise that sounded like thunder erupted. The Flood that they were fighting moments ago (along with a thousand others) had charged into the room. As they began to take up the entire space, the warriors (including a captive Keyes) backed up. There was no way that they could kill them all. There were just too many of them. There was only one option left for them.

"Everyone, fall back." ordered the Supreme Commander

They immediately headed for the gravity lift area only to be stopped by the sound of gun fire followed by a small cry of pain. They all turned around and saw that one of the SpecOps members, 'Anonmee, was shot directly through the shin several times with purple blood dripping down his leg. One of the combat forms must've shot him while his energy shields were down. He fell on his other leg, gripping his shin with one hand (a gun in the other) and squinting in pain.

"'Anonmee!" shouted 'Sraomee

"Go on without me!" insisted 'Anonmee

"No!" barked 'Vadumee "I have not left a single warrior behind in battle before and so help me, I am not planning on doing so today!"

'Vadumee raced over and threw the wounded SpecOps' arm over his shoulder, carrying him. With that, the troops darted to the gravity lift (which was on the other side of the ship) with the Flood following closely behind. They raced through the hallways as they were chased by the Flood trying to make their escape. Two of them shot back at the Flood trying to buy the others some time. They also had to fight off Parasites that tried to attack them from the front hallway after hallway. Finally, after minutes of perilous evasion

from the Flood, the lance had finally made it to the gravity lift room which was a small room with a panel on the wall and a closed hatch in the middle of the floor.

'Sraomee ran up to the panel and slammed the side of his fist into a button that was often used in case the hatch didn't open up automatically (which that time, it didn't). The door on the hatch immediately opened up releasing a blue light down onto the ground below. Everyone jumped down the hole two to one at a time starting with Rtas and 'Anonmee and ending with 'Insosamee, who, with 'Koralamee, fended off the Flood (which were close behind them than one would think). As 'Insosamee came through, the hole closed up automatically on its own. They all made it safely back down onto the dark, forest floor where everyone else was waiting.

"Everyone, back to the ships!" commanded 'Insosamee

"What's happening, Supreme Commander?" asked an Unggoy

"There is no time to explain! We all need to get to a safe distance, now. "

After the Unggoy simply shrugged and walked away, he opened up the Battlenet and contacted the drop ships in the area.

"_This is the Supreme Commander speaking. As soon as everyone is on board on every single Spirit, I want you to destroy the Truth and Reconciliation._"

"_But, sir, what about the rest of the crew?_" asked one of the _Spirit _pilots

"_There was only one survivorâ€¦_"

"_Survivor? Survivor of wha-_"

"_Let us discuss this at a more reasonable moment. Right now is not the best time._"

'Insosamee stroked his neon orange colored helmet and sighed, feeling under pressure. Today's events were very disturbing. This was one of the most stressful days of his entire career. Never before had he encountered anything like this. This was definitely not a human attack. What these _things_ were; these Parasites; he didn't really want to know. But a part of him told him that he desperately needed to know about this Flood. He turned around and walked towards the drop ship that had just landed behind him only a moment ago.

* * *

>The Master Chief felt the vibration of his battle rifle forcing the bullets out of the barrel as he pulled the trigger. With it, he had taken out several Brutes and Elites. After they were down, he quickly pulled out some ammo and reloaded his gun calmly. He sighed; when were these sons of bitches going to learn that they should never mess with the human race? He noticed a Grunt running passed him trying to flee the battle. He beat the Grunt in the back of his head with the end of his weapon, his light blue blood flowing over the grass. Something in the Chief's mind told him that they weren't going to learn for a while. <p>"Hey, Chief, look!" exclaimed Cortana "The

Covenant, they'reâ€| retreating."<p>

She was right. Every vehicle that belonged to the enemy was fleeing from the battle. The marines started cheering over their glorious victory. The day was theirs; they had won. However, there was one teeny, tiny thing they wanted to do before the Covenant was completely out of sight. A platoon of marines grabbed a few _Warthogs_ and drove after them across the plains.

* * *

>"Field Master," said the Spirit pilot "The humans have caught up with us. It looks like they are back for more."

"What? Give me a visual."

The Zealot looked over the _Spirit_ pilot's shoulder as he brought up on the screen a video image of a handful of human vehicles underneath them. The two Sangheili watched closely trying to study the humans' movements. But, it didn't look like they were trying to attack. Were they trying toâ€| negotiate perhaps? It was hard to tell. They were just driving around as it appeared.

"Stop the ship." ordered the Zealot

After the pilot did so, they continued to watch the screen. The humans were driving around as if their vehicles were dancing. The vehicles went back, forth, left and right all over the place, swerving in different directions. Have they gone mad? What kind of lunacy is this? Moments passed until finally the humans finished whatever it was they were doing and headed towards the direction they came from. On the ground there was a message imbedded by the tires of their vehicles. The Zealot or the pilot could not understand the message as it wasn't written in their language.

"Can you translate it?" asked the Zealot

"I think so." replied the pilot pressing a few buttons

A few moments later, the screen brought up a few letters from their language, interpreting the message.

"It says," started the pilot "â€|'_You suck_'."

The Zealot pounded his fist against the wall in anger.

* * *

>Later that night, the marines and the SPARTANs had set up camp a few miles from the area where they fought celebrating their victory (and their little prank which, of course, was led by Johnson). They gathered around a few separate fires where they talked, ate dinner and laughed. All of the sudden, Johnson stood up and called for everyone's attention to make an announcement. <p>"Alright, marines, listen up," he said "In some aspect of every soldier's life, there comes a time where one must take a gun in hand, some grenades in pocket and kick some super-sized Covenant ass. Today was one of those days where we most certainly did kick some super-sized Covenant ass (SHUT UP, WILLIAMS!!). As I was sayin', as a reward for your hard work and dedication to our beloved Corps, I hereby present

you with this!"

Johnson pulled out a large black container which interested the troops.

"I've been savin' these babies for over three months now." smiled Johnson

"Is there something in the box, Serge?" asked one of the privates

"No," replied Johnson sarcastically "Are you sure? Of course there's somethin' in the box, dumbass!"

Johnson then slowly opened the box and inside of it, the marines found much delight in.

"No way." said one marine

"I thought they were destroyed when the _Autumn_ crashed." said another marine

"There really is a Godâ€|" said a third marine

"Damn right there is, Private," said Johnson "'Cause today, God has given us beer!"

The marines roared with excitement. Ah yes, beer; one of man's many sources of refreshment (giving it the nickname, "Man Fuel"). Johnson passed out the beers (which was the most popular brand of beer, Bud Dark) to as many marines as he could.

"I have five more boxes so there's plenty enough to go around (None for you, Mikayla!)," said Johnson "But let's please try not to overdo it. I don't wanna have any men who can't fight because of a hangover."

"Aw, Johnson, you shouldn't have." said Kelly grabbing a bottle

"Hell, I did anyway." grinned Johnson

"How did you get these off the _Autumn_ anyway?" asked a corporal

"Well, when the Covenant attackedâ€|"

Meanwhile, the Chief was lying on his back looking at the stars above. Not only were the stars in view, but the rest of the ring world was as well making it look like there was a titanium arch starting and ending on both sides of the world. He was deep in thought as if he were in some sort of hypnotic gaze. He couldn't help it though; after all, the sky was beautiful tonight.

"You're awfully quiet." said Cortana

"I know." replied the Chief

He sat up to face the people surrounding one of the campfires who were in various discussions. A moment later, Kelly came over and sat

right next to the Chief with her helmet in one hand and a bottle in the other. The Chief saw her earlier that day but didn't have a chance to talk to her. Her brown hair was tied up into a little bun and her hazel eyes glowed from the light of the fire. She was smiling too; you would think that after many years of war, she would end up like Will, all grim and silent. But no, Kelly wasn't the type to be broken easily.

"Hey, Chief, it's been a while." she asked

"Yeah." said the Chief

"How've you been lately?"

"Uh, good, I guess. Yourself?"

"Fine, fine."

There was a moment of silence between the two of them. The Chief tried to think of something to continue the conversation. After all, she was a really good friend of his and he didn't want to seem like he was neglecting her. When he found out what he wanted to say, one of the marines had already spoken up.

"You know," said the marine "I've been thinking. I think we should give this place a name."

"Like what?" asked Johnson who had overheard the conversation "Hula hoop Land?"

"Uh, I don't knowâ€¦ something like that. Maybe Hoop? Helios?"

"Hey, what about Halo?" asked another marine

"Yeah, I could go with Halo." said Evan-049

"Sounds fine with me." agreed Cortana

"Yeah, it's got a nice _ring_ to it." a third marine chimed in (pun intended)

"Aw hell no! You did not just say that! Oh my God. That is the most freaking corniest thing I've ever heard in my life. Jesus, Meyers! Come on. Don't ever say that again." everyone moaned

The Chief looked up at the sky once more, staring at the rest of the ring once again in a hypnotic gaze. Halo, huh? The name sounded like it had an air of mystery around it which fit the place perfectly. Plus, it did look like a halo. The name Halo seemedâ€¦ nice. No, it seemedâ€¦ perfect. He figured he could use to it. And thus, the name Halo was born.

End
file.